American Diplomacy in Russia's Neighborhood

By James E. Goodby

A quietly simmering crisis in Russian-American relations has become more heated in the last two years as the stakes have become more publicly visible. The crisis stems from quite different perceptions in Washington and Moscow concerning Russian and American interests in the former Soviet lands around Russia's borders. The arc of newly independent nations that were once part of the Soviet Union are seen by the current Russian government as part of a "common space." In the Bush administration, they are seen as assets in the war against terrorism or as states yearning to be free.

In President Putin's speech to the Federal Assembly on May 16, 2003, he said "we see the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] area as the sphere of our strategic interests." By April 2005, in his annual speech to the Federal Assembly, Putin was urging unity within the CIS, pointing to the victory in World War II that unity had made possible. He spoke about the independence of the CIS nations and their "international authority." But he also suggested that total independence was not quite what he had in mind when he said "we would like to achieve synchronization of the pace and parameters of reform processes underway in Russia and the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States." On its face, this would seem to mean that Russia wants a say in how fast democratic and economic reforms should take place in the neighboring states, and what they should be.

Putin was quite clear in his April 2005 speech about how he views the world and interprets Russia's recent history: " . . . the collapse of the Soviet Union was the major geopolitical disaster of the century." He added that "the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself." This is part of the explanation for why Putin feels as he does about developments in the newly independent states and why he fought so hard for the losing presidential candidate in Ukraine. Putin's domestic policies, his policies in Chechnya, and his attitude toward the former republics of the Soviet Union around Russia's borders all bespeak his inordinate fear of Russia's disintegration. He seems to think that Russian preeminence in what he calls the "post-Soviet area" is an indispensable

element of the defense of the unity of the Russian Federation.

During her trip to Russia just a few days before Putin's speech, Secretary of State Rice made it clear that the United States expected Russia to continue to have influence in neighboring states and that she expected to see close relations between Russia and these states. Asked by a Russian newsman whether U.S. support for Ukrainian membership in NATO could be seen as a friendly gesture towards Russia, Dr. Rice said "as Ukraine moves toward these Euro-Atlantic structures, again, it does not have to be at the expense of good relations with Russia." In another interview in Moscow Dr. Rice was asked whether "a zone of confrontation of Russian and U.S. interests" was developing in Ukraine and elsewhere in Russia's neighborhood. Her answer was that the United States does not see itself "as somehow supplanting Russian influence." To the contrary, ties between these countries and Russia would be very close, and Russia would benefit from having prosperous, democratic nations in its neighborhood. She contrasted this "21st century" point of view with the "zero sum" thinking of the 19th century. This argument is essentially the same made by President Clinton's second secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, in justifying the expansion of NATO. The argument is regarded with considerable skepticism in Moscow.

The lines have been politely but clearly drawn: Moscow thinks that its security is best served by some degree of control over states that formerly were part of the Soviet Union; Washington says that freedom and independence for these states, accompanied by democratic institutions, will benefit both the United States and Russia and serve Russia's own security interests. At the same time, the Bush administration sees strategic advantages in its relations with states around Russia's borders and seeks to exploit those advantages. The contradictions are probably more obvious to Russians than to Americans.

The issues could not be more starkly posed than in the contrast between Ukrainian membership in NATO, which the Bush administration sees as promoting democratic institutions, and Putin's desire for "synchronized" reforms within the Commonwealth of Independent States. Or in Washington's dependence on Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, for services in connection with the war on terror and the desire of the Uzbek

people for freedoms that Karimov denies them. But these are not the only issues. There are challenges to American diplomacy throughout Russia's neighborhood, perhaps the most important being relations with Russia itself.

An Aversion to "Permanent Revolution"

Great expectations have been raised by the success of the opposition in Georgia in 2003 in toppling the corrupt leadership of that country, followed by Ukraine's assertion in the very next year of its independence and its right to a government that respects its people's wishes. Moldova felt this in the elections of March 2005. The mood reached Kyrgyzstan, in Central Asia, shortly afterwards. The Bush administration has chosen to make democracy in Russia and elsewhere an issue in its conduct of foreign policy during its second term. The logic of its policies should now compel it to give a higher priority to the "frozen conflicts" and frozen political regimes left over from the retreat of the Soviet empire. That same logic should also question the tolerance of Washington for undemocratic regimes that happen to be helpful to other American interests, such as secure supplies of energy.

American interests in good working relations with Russia and American interests in encouraging democracy and freedom throughout Eurasia should not result in a conflicted U.S. foreign policy towards this region. Pursuing these two sets of interests should be compatible within a policy framework designed to promote a Euroatlantic security community, including Russia, based on common values and a broad sense of a common identity. But the reality is that selective American activism—Belarus, contrasted with Kazakhstan, for example—in an area so sensitive to Russia will strain the crucial relationship with Moscow. The international climate is so charged and hopes and fears have risen to such heights that neither Putin nor Bush can afford to neglect this suddenly fluid situation. For Bush, it is clear that from Belarus and Moldova to the Caucasus to Central Asia the advance of freedom and democracy, the key tenet in his Second Inaugural, is being tested. His doctrine faces very serious challenges in these countries, where territorial disputes have gone unresolved for years and where fraudulent elections have been the norm. Consistency will be the key to success. Giving passes to

tyrants who happen to be "our tyrants" will not work, even though Putin also supports those tyrants.

Putin's belief that Russia must have acquiescent governments in charge of the former Soviet republics has contributed to the corruption of the political process in many of these countries. And that has led to growing pressures for change in Russia's neighborhood. Massive public protests in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan as well as the violence in Uzbekistan, have shown what happens when people get fed up with corrupt leaders who deliver little except to perpetuate themselves in power. This may feed back into Russia itself in time; in fact, it may already have begun to do.

Will the political changes that have appeared and may appear in "post-Soviet space" succeed in transforming the frozen political landscape? If they can, the interrupted march toward a Europe that is peaceful, undivided, and democratic will be resumed and, in time, Russia will join it. This is not Putin's vision of the future. He has left no doubt that he prefers the status quo and will fight against change that he cannot control. Alluding to events in Georgia and Ukraine in public remarks on February 22, 2005, he asked why some "are doomed to permanent revolution . . . why should we introduce this in the post-Soviet space?" The answer is that Putin's policies have led to pent-up demands for changes and these demands are not being met. The result was predictable: a series of political explosions, with perhaps more to come. His later remarks about "synchronized" change may mean that he finally "gets it," but still wants predictability.

The changes that have occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan may be reversed: democratic institutions have shallow roots in most of "post-Soviet space." Other nations in the area may be more resistant to public pressure, more willing to use force against it, as President Lukashenko of Belarus and President Karimov of Uzbekistan have shown. It is too early to speak of a trend. And so an undivided Europe remains an idea, not a reality. If things remain as they are in Russia the reality of a continent divided will congeal, leaving Russia on the other side of the fence from a democratic Europe. Putin sees Russia as a major European power with a civilizing mission in Eurasia, as he put it in his 2005 speech to the Federal Assembly. He also

seems to see Russia as the leader of a Eurasian bloc of nations, to some extent in opposition to the nations of the West. This vision is hard to square with being a member of a European or Euroatlantic community of nations. And if President Bush is willing to tolerate undemocratic regimes that happen to be helpful to particular American goals, that also will work against a Euroatlantic security community.

How Putin Understands Influence

The image of the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still fresh in the minds of a great many Russians. Putin is not alone in that. Fears of separatist movements within Russia obviously reinforce Putin's *realpolitik* instincts to maintain a close alignment with the former republics of the Soviet Union. He sees ethnically-based communities within the Russian Federation as possible secessionists, and his fears probably have some basis in fact.

His reaction is to fight not only against any secessionist movement, as in Chechnya, but also to fight against any loss of influence over the states in "post-Soviet space." He prefers to keep in power those leaders who are dependably loyal to Moscow even though their governments may be fragile and undemocratic. Although this could be described as neo-imperialism, a longer view, and very likely a more accurate view, would see it as the process of managing an empire passing through its recessional stage, not unlike the way France maintained control over its former African colonies after granting them nominal independence. A desire to have friendly neighbors on their borders is hardly unique to Russia's current leaders. Nor is it unusual for a powerful state to expect that its opinions and interests will have some influence on the policies of neighboring states. This is what Secretary Rice emphasized in her remarks in Moscow in April 2005.

Russia, like other post-imperial powers, has trouble adjusting to its changed status, believing that it should have a privileged position in the nations that once were part of the Czarist and then Soviet empire. Of course. But there is a line beyond which a special relationship becomes domination and a denial of freedom. To the extent that Putin's actions succeed in propping up authoritarian leaders long past the time when they should have left the scene he crosses that line. Large powers within a Euroatlantic

community will exercise some influence over others, and Russia is one of those powers. What cannot be done in a community like this is to use that influence to control or seek domination over others or to hinder their progress toward democracy.

In 2001, President Vladimir Putin found it useful to align Russia with the West in the war on terrorism. His post-9/11 statements were welcomed by many who saw it as a decision to define Russia's identity as a "normal European nation." The Westernizers had won the centuries-old struggle for Russia's soul, so it was said. That assessment was premature. Putin's decisions derived from another source, a desire for a freer hand in Chechnya and elsewhere in "post-Soviet space." Putin's internal policies suggest that his post-9/11 rapprochement with the United States carried with it no connotations about Russia's integration with the West, despite his assertions that Russia can lay claim to being as European as any other European nation. Putin expected that Washington would support his view that the struggle in Chechnya was part of the war on terrorism and to a substantial degree, that is what the Bush administration has done, with the Chechen terrorist Shamil Basayev providing a justification.

The opportunistic, Eurasian foreign policy of Yevgeni Primakov, and other Russian statesmen before him, is back in vogue. The diplomacy of Putin and the "siloviki," his former colleagues in the KGB who now occupy key positions in the Russian government, will require a confrontation with the United States if American activities seem to be encouraging too much, too fast in the newly independent states. President Putin's ambassador in Washington, writing on February 22, 2005, said that " . . . many in Russia are expressing serious concern about American intentions in the post-Soviet space, including in Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia." Despite U.S. military bases in Central Asia, and U.S. military assistance to Georgia, there is no real reason why Russia should feel threatened from the West but historical experiences have seared deeply into Russian thinking. To this day, classical European power politics seems to have a great influence on Russian policies. Not surprisingly, zero-sum thinking is encouraged by what Russians see as selective application of U.S. human rights policies.

Putin's attitudes toward the West and toward Russia's neighbors do not

necessarily bespeak aggressive tendencies or ill will. But they speak volumes about his view of Russia's identity. Russia, he says, is a nation that created modern Europe together with the other European nations. Yet he is positioning his nation so that it may never truly be part of Europe in the sense of shared values and shared self-identification. Many great nations, the United States included, think of themselves as exceptional and expect others to acknowledge that. The Monroe Doctrine was devised to prevent European powers from gaining a foothold in America's back yard. That backward-looking analogy captures the nature of the problem. Putin's policies in Russia's neighborhood harken back to earlier times, as Secretary Rice has implied, and do not fit well with the idea of an undivided Europe. Putin has come very close to denying Russia's neighbors the choice of any policies or leaders except those of which he approves. Even his "synchronization" policy could amount to that. If Putin thought Russia's identity and vocation was to be a member of a Euroatlantic community of democracies he would not worry about Russia's neighbors' becoming democratic and joining in the same community. But, in fact, Putin does worry about this and sees it as hostile behavior—as a zero-sum game.

Russia's old antagonist, the United States, is not blameless for this development. Aside from the selective application of human rights policies, several other Bush administration policies create anti-American feelings in Moscow. The Bush administration's announcement in December 2001 of its intention to abrogate the 1972 anti-ballistic missile (ABM) treaty, which Putin wanted to preserve, was one blow to the idea of integration with the West. Another was NATO's decision in November 2002 to invite seven new members to join NATO, including the three Baltic states. They became members in 2004. The lifting of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which restricts Russia's trade with the United States, never happened. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, in 2003, over Moscow's objections, gave Putin a chance to align himself with France and Germany, which he did, while managing to preserve good personal relations with President Bush. Would different American policies have encouraged Putin whole-heartedly to take Russia into the Euroatlantic community? Perhaps, but probably only on his terms.

Putin's internal policies—the practice of "managed democracy"—have drawn

criticisms from Bush, but American "meddling" in the affairs of Russia's neighbors seems to worry Putin more than that. He is worried about the methods used by the opposition in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and suspects that the United States incited them. He views U.S. support for building civil societies in those nations as the source of his problems, rather than corrupt governance by leaders who overstayed their welcome. On November 26, 2004, commenting at a press conference in The Hague on the situation in Ukraine, Putin remarked that "we have no moral right to incite mass disturbances in a major European state. We must not make solving disputes of this nature through street disturbances part of international practice".

Challenges in Russia's Neighborhood

The Russian government is not the origin of all the problems in the enormously complex mix of ethnic groups that inhabit the regions around its borders and within Russia itself. Moscow is the enabler of separatist movements in Moldova and the Caucasus and seems to find that divide and conquer policies suit its needs. But it would be simplistic to think that if Moscow suddenly became cooperative, all would be well. The causes of separation are deep-rooted and will not be easily removed. They will have to be addressed by the central governments in affected countries and this process will take a long time.

Ethnic identity is the origin of the separatist impulse, and a desire for self-determination flows from that. The principle of self-determination does not carry with it the legal right to secession, but that is the way many ethnic communities interpret it. The justice, honesty, and competence of central governments are interests shared by all citizens. If there are doubts about those characteristics in a legitimately elected government, the adverse reactions will be strongest among minorities that already are disaffected. It will not be enough simply to bring the parties to a separatist dispute to the negotiating table to discuss logical and reasonable solutions. Because of the emotions and the long histories involved in all these disputes, it will take time before trust takes root.

The complexities are no excuse for taking a pass but the implications for U.S.

policy are often contradictory and boil down to the best of a series of bad choices. The basic guideline for policy, especially after Bush's Second Inaugural speech, is fairly clear. It is to support democratic institutions and processes throughout the region without exception, and to assist all nations making the transition from authoritarianism to pluralistic democracies, regardless of other considerations. The near impossibility of pursuing such a policy will become clear in the following discussion of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. While the conflict in Chechnya remains unresolved, it will also adversely affect Moscow's policies and attitudes and certainly challenge the mission that President Bush prescribed for U.S. policy in his Second Inaugural speech. And yet the mission must be pursued, just as containment was for half a century.

Belarus

The regime of President Alexander Lukashenko has returned Belarus to the days of Soviet authoritarianism. Opposition figures have been imprisoned. The economy is still based on state-owned enterprises. There are no signs that Lukashenko would willingly step down or allow free elections. Elected president for the first time in 1994, he has gained power through referenda which were almost certainly tainted by fraud. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reported that the parliamentary elections and the referendum conducted on October 17, 2004 "fell significantly short of OSCE commitments. Universal principles and constitutionally guaranteed rights of expression, association and assembly were seriously challenged . . .." The OSCE noted that during the election campaign, Lukashenko said that Belarusian laws contain "elements of authoritarianism." Following the elections and the referendum, according to the OSCE, "opposition protest manifestations in Minsk were forcibly suppressed."

What happens to opposition leaders in Belarus can be seen in the fate of Mikhail Marinich, a former Minister of Foreign Economic Relations. He was found guilty of misappropriation of property in December 2004 and sentenced to five years in a high-security prison. The head of the OSCE mission in Minsk visited him on March 23, 2005 in a prison hospital where he had been taken following a stroke, probably due to his being denied proper medication.

It appears that the Putin government is not comfortable with what Lukashenko is doing in Belarus. In international forums like the Council of Europe, however, Russian representatives argue that criticism will only make things worse. In addition, Lukashenko and Putin have endorsed a Russia-Belarus Union and are working together on programs to bring about economic integration.

The Bush administration focused public attention on this situation in Belarus during the visits of Secretary of State Rice to Europe in April 2005 and the visit of the president to Russia in May 2005. In an interview with CNN on April 20, Rice said:

> But I would hope that particularly in Belarus—which is really the last remaining true dictatorship in the heart of Europe—that you would begin to see some democratic development. There are organizations there and civil society groups that are crying out for the rest of the world to acknowledge them and to give them a place to make a home so that they can go back and do something for the people of Belarus.

Dr. Rice also made a point of meeting with a group of Belarusian dissidents while on her trip.

Speaking on Lithuanian television from the White House on May 4, 2005, President Bush staked out a strong position on Belarus. He said that the United States would work with other countries "to insist there be free elections, and make sure there's free elections. This is the last remaining dictatorship in Europe." Predictably, the Lukashenko regime has said it will resist the kinds of activities that led to changes of governments elsewhere. Russian foreign minister Lavrov cautioned about imposing democracy from outside. Lukashenko was given an opportunity to show that he would ruthlessly put down any opposition when he had his police rough up demonstrators in Minsk in April 2005. In his speech to the National Assembly he promised "harsh and adequate" measures to deal with any attempt to destabilize Belarus.

The next presidential elections in Belarus are now set for 2006. In the months leading up to those elections, President Bush has promised to work for free elections. President Lukashenko has promised to resist all attempts to change the way Belarus is run. Although many Russians dislike the kind of society that Lukashenko has built, Putin's concern for controlling events on his borders is evident in his government's

attitude towards Belarus. The confrontation between Russia and the West over Belarus will probably build in intensity over the next year.

Ukraine

Ukraine's elections in December 2004 brought to power a new president, Victor Yushchenko, who wants closer ties with the European Union. The human rights problems so evident under his predecessor probably will not reappear. Yushchenko's candidacy was strongly opposed by Putin, who personally campaigned for his opponent. Euphoria over the rejection of a tainted election and the election of a thoroughly democratic leader in Ukraine should not blind anyone to the realities of the situation. Ukraine is a country divided. Governing in a way that will please a substantial majority over the next few years will be very difficult, but if Yushchenko's policies show some early successes, he should be able to secure his political flank in eastern Ukraine. These policies may not always please the United States. If he fails, however, Russia will be ready to assist in achieving a different outcome, if opportunities arise.

Moves by the new government to link Ukraine to Western institutions will not receive automatic public approval. A majority appears to support membership in the EU. A February 2005 poll showed opponents of NATO membership outnumbering supporters by a three-to-one margin. Western European governments will probably favor a go-slow approach, both with respect to relations with the EU and NATO. Support by the United States for a Ukrainian bid for membership in NATO already has been voiced by President Bush. The process will probably take a considerable amount of time to mature and meanwhile the United States should take parallel steps to support Russia's integration with the West. For Washington to encourage a sharp line dividing Russia and Ukraine would be as senseless as it would be for Moscow to try to draw one between Ukraine and the West. A success story? Not yet.

Moldova

The normalization of Moldova's internal arrangements and Moldova's relations with the rest of Europe have been seriously hampered by many years of impasse over several

inter-related issues. The first is the forced partition of the country through the creation in the eastern part of Moldova of an entity calling itself the "Transdniestr Republic," with headquarters in Tiraspol, headed by "President" Igor Smirnov. The faction running the "Transdniestr Republic" insists on the Russification of that part of Moldova, although only about one-third of the inhabitants are native Russian speakers. The second, and related issue, is the presence in that same part of Moldova of a Russian-commanded military force, formerly the Russian Fourteenth Army, now labeled as "peacekeepers". Most of the troops in this force are native-born Moldovans. Further complicating the situation is the presence in this part of Moldova of a very large weapons and ammunition storage facility left over from Soviet times. Weapons from this facility have been sold, illicitly, to Chechen guerilla fighters, among others. The situation has led to crime and corruption on a large scale. It has become a permanent irritant within the Euroatlantic community, blocking economic and political development in that area. It casts a larger shadow than more visible international problems.

Boris Yeltsin, when president of the Russian Federation, pledged that Russian troops and military equipment would be removed from Moldova. The OSCE Summit Declaration issued at Istanbul in November 1999 stated:

> We welcome the commitment by the Russian Federation to complete withdrawal of the Russian forces from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002. We also welcome the willingness of the Republic of Moldova and of the OSCE to facilitate this process, within their respective abilities by the agreed deadline.

A bilateral Russian-Moldovan agreement on troop withdrawals was signed at the same time. All Russian equipment limited by the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Forces—concluded in 1999 but never ratified—was withdrawn by the deadline in that Treaty. The remaining weapons are small arms and ammunition for all kinds of weapons. These munitions and the Russian-commanded force still remain in Moldova, against the wishes of the Moldovan and all other European governments and contrary to commitments made at the highest level by the Russian government. Even the extensions agreed at subsequent OSCE meetings have not been met.

In addition to all the other problems flowing from this "frozen conflict," the

failure to resolve the issue is preventing the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe—a treaty that limits deployment of key weapons systems—from entering into force. The United States and other European states have declared that they will not ratify the Treaty until Russia has fulfilled its troop withdrawal commitments in Moldova and Georgia. The Adapted Treaty would benefit all European states and provide more security content for the OSCE agenda but it will not do so until the Russian military presence has been removed.

Moldova's president, Vladimir Voronin, thought that Moldova had no choice but to settle for a more or less co-equal federation between the two parts of Moldova and to work closely with Russia to that end. In fact, Voronin initialed a document master-minded by a high-ranking Russian official, Dmitry Kozak, in November 2003. On reflectiion, Voronin repudiated it shortly afterwards. Voronin won a political victory in March 2005 when his main support, the Communist Party, maintained a majority in the elections for parliament, though its seats shrank from 71 to 56. He now seems to have become more determined to achieve a position that affirms Moldova's sovereignty over all of its territory, and the recent elections should fortify him in that.

History, as always, has had a hand in developments in Moldova. The part of Moldova now under the control of the central government was at one time part of Russia and at another time part of Romania. The province was known as Bessarabia. Naturally, the idea of Moldova's uniting with Romania has been part of the political background. Romanians and the majority of Moldovans speak essentially the same language. For the speakers of Russian, Ukrainian, and other languages in Moldova, whose history is not linked to Bessarabia, uniting with Romania would not be acceptable. Already, these people complain about Romanian (or Moldovan) as the state language and the use of the Roman alphabet. Some assurances or guarantees about Moldova's future relationship with Romania would have to be part of any settlement. The Kozak proposal provided for the right of Transdniestria to secede from Moldova if the central government decided to accede to another state.

The parties to recent efforts to resolve the conflict have been the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, and the two parts of Moldova. Neither the EU nor the United States were

directly involved in the OSCE-led format. The entry onto the negotiating scene of a Ukraine that is determined to resolve the issue should make a big difference, although Yushchenko's first effort unfortunately replicated some of the flaws of the Kozak proposal. The simple step of Ukraine's tightening control of its border with Trans-Dniestr, perhaps assisted by OSCE monitors, would cut off the unlicensed trade and the illicit smuggling and would make a huge impact. A more assertive Ukraine will dramatically change the negotiating terrain and President Yushchenko seems interested in doing this, with results yet to be seen.

One thing that is clear is that re-drawing the frontiers in Eastern Europe will raise more problems than it would solve. For Russia, this should be a reminder of the nightmare of disintegration that seems to obsess Putin.

Needless to say, a reunited Moldova would also need a great deal of economic support which only the EU and the United States would be likely to supply. Moldova currently receives most of its energy supplies from Russia—on credit, in the Trans-Dniestr region—and continued Russian support cannot be assumed, although it should certainly be expected in the context of a fair settlement.

Georgia

Chechnya, terrorism, and Caspian Sea oil combine to make Georgia an even more sensitive problem than Moldova. For the United States, access to a strategically important region also is a consideration. President Bush's visit to Georgia in May 2005 was very successful, and he talked about mediation. Russian cooperation is essential to resolving the disputes that beset the Caucasus. It may be difficult to obtain that while Chechnya is so unsettled, but it should not be impossible.

Moscow was troubled by the way political change in Georgia was forced on the old guard. The "Rose Revolution", the name bestowed on the massive demonstrations by young Georgians, ousted Eduard Shevardnadze as president of Georgia on November 23, 2003. Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president in January 2004, reportedly with 96% of the vote. Shevardnadze, Gorbachev's foreign minister and a key player in ending the Cold War, unfortunately presided over an increasingly corrupt and ineffective

government. As happened later in Ukraine, young activists demanded a change and forced it to happen. Speaking of the change at the top in Georgia, President Putin remarked on February 22, 2005 that "the previous president and the current president are equally attractive partners, with whom we should find a common language . . . given that we really do have many centuries of special relations with Georgia."

Economic progress, so badly needed in the Caucasus, will be difficult to achieve while the security situation is in such turmoil. Georgia has been the recipient of substantial U.S. economic assistance, in part because it is on the route of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that carries oil to the West. Russia, of course, wants to maintain the Northern Route, from Baku to Novorossiysk, but major Western oil companies, with encouragement from their governments, have worked to re-orient the pipeline infrastructure towards the West. Russian policies concerning the Caucasus are influenced by these and other considerations.

The Pankisi Gorge, in the north of Georgia near the border with Chechnya, has become seriously embroiled in spill-over from the Chechen conflict. Russia believed that it was a transit route for terrorists and supplies fueling the armed conflict in Chechnya. Washington evidently had evidence that supported that. Because of that, Washington decided to send a military training team to Georgia in May 2002 to assist the Georgians in dealing with the terrorist problem in the Gorge. That generated criticism in Moscow but it helped Georgia establish a greater degree of control over the Gorge. Under the aegis of the OSCE, at the request of Georgia, a Border Monitoring Operation also was established in early 2000. Late in 2004 the Russians, claiming that the monitors were useless, forced the OSCE to discontinue the Border Monitoring Operation. This was done over the objections of Georgia and other members of the OSCE and, at this writing, it appears that it will be reversed. An international effort to seal the Georgia-Chechnya border and to root out any new or remaining terrorist cells in the Pankisi Gorge is still needed.

As in Moldova, there is a Russian military presence in Georgia and it is an irritant. Bush spoke of this during his visit to Georgia. Two Russian bases had been dismantled, as Yeltsin had agreed to do in November 1999. But two other Russian bases

remain, one at Akhalkalaki and the other at Batumi. Also as in Moldova, most of the troops are not ethnic Russians—Armenians form the core of the contingent at Akhalkalaki and Georgians are the majority at Batumi. Moscow has said that at least ten years will be required to dismantle the bases while Georgia would like to see an earlier withdrawal. As a form of protest President Saakashvili declined an invitation to join Putin in Moscow for the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. He has told the Russians that foreign troops will not be permitted bases in Georgia once the two remaining Russian bases have been given up. Agreement was reached at the end of May 2005 that Russian troops and equipment would be removed by 2008.

The disputes in Georgia flow in part from the Chechen war. And the conflicts there with Russia are "frozen" only in the sense that they have never been resolved. As with Moldova, Russian-backed break-away regions defy Tbilisi's authority—Abkhazia and South Ossetia have received overt aid and support from Russia. An unsuccessful Georgian military campaign in South Ossetia in August 2004 failed to break South Ossetian resistance. In addition to these problems with Russia, Georgia has problems involving other ethnic groups, the Armenians and Azeris.

Direct discussions have taken place between senior Georgian leaders and the leaders of South Ossetia. With Russian support, this dispute probably could be resolved with Tbilisi regaining sovereignty in the region. Abkhazia is a more difficult issue and the problem is in the hands of the UN, not the OSCE. The 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit Declaration stated that "we . . .are ready to work with the United Nations to prepare and submit a draft document addressing the distribution of constitutional competencies between the central authorities of Georgia and authorities of Abkhazia, Georgia." The Abkhaz have a long history as a people and, like the Chechens, a fierce desire for independence. Many of them have acquired Russian passports as a way of resisting integration into Georgia.

Armenia and Azerbaijan

For several years, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, legally a part of Azerabaijan, has been under the control of ethnic Armenians, who formed the majority in the region.

Armenian troops police the region. Azerbaijanis were forced out of the territory. A cease-fire agreement has generally held since 1994 but Azeri refugees are still unable to return to their homes. This is truly a "frozen conflict" because the "Minsk Group", co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States and armed with an OSCE mandate, has been unable to make any real headway in resolving the issue.

The co-chairs have advanced proposals to resolve the conflict and bilateral talks have been held between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan--all to no avail. The current president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, have met and have stated that they support a process of dialogue but the issue has defied resolution. It is a classic case of both sides' wanting the same piece of real estate. Armenia wants self-determination for the region and a link between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerabaijan insists on its territorial integrity. The basic elements of a settlement are an agreement on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh linked to Armenian troop withdrawals from that region.

The two presidents are key to finding a solution, based on these two points. There is little that the OSCE and its Minsk Group can do absent a determination by the two presidents that the time has come to resolve the conflict. But a broad push, backed by the United States, Russia, and the E.U., to settle all of the "frozen conflicts" would help in getting public opinion and advocacy groups in Armenia and Azerbaijan to support a real negotiation and the difficult choices that would have to be made.

Chechnya

Of all the conflicts left over from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fighting in Chechnya has made it the bloodiest and the most consequential of them all. The cost in human lives has been very high although accurate numbers are hard to come by. Media reports suggest that as of Spring 2005, as many as 200,000 Chechens may have died as a result of the conflict, and 25,000 Russian servicemen killed. The struggle has had a major impact on Putin and his policies, both internal and external. It probably was the reason that Putin attained the presidency of Russia.

Russian military actions there are supposed to preserve the unity of the Russian

Federation. This was the reason given for President Yeltsin's decision to send Russian military forces into Grozny in 1994. A peace settlement reached in 1997 under Yeltsin preserved the nominal unity of the state but with Chechens in charge of the administration of Chechnya. Aslan Maskhadov, who had led the successful Chechen counter-attack against Russian forces in 1996, became president of Chechnya. Sadly, he was unable to bring order to the region and it became a center of criminal activity. His rival, Shamil Basayev, evidently was beyond Maskhadov's control. Terrorism became Basayev's weapon of choice and he seems to have received support from Islamist radicals, perhaps including Osama bin Laden. In the summer of 1999, Basayev's raid into Russian territory (neighboring Dagestan) and alleged attacks on apartment buildings in Moscow escalated events to the point of no return. President Yeltsin appointed Putin his prime minister on August 9, 1999, following which Russia launched air attacks against Chechnya, in September 1999, and sent in ground troops in October. Yeltsin resigned the presidency on December 31, 1999 in favor of Putin. Putin's election in his own right to the presidency of Russia in March 2000 was owed in part to the popularity of his decision to subdue the revolt in Chechnya.

On September 11, 2001, the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon gave Putin an opportunity to reinforce the idea that Russia was fighting radical Islamist terrorism in Chechnya. Aligning himself squarely with President Bush in the war on terrorism in September 2001, Putin emphasized that Russia and the United States had common enemies and common interests. Putin's roll-back of the democratic institutions that Yeltsin had encouraged showed that integration with the West was not one of Putin's strategic objectives. His basic concern was the unity of the Russian Federation. His distrust of pluralism is plain, and that extends to his attitude toward states on Russia's periphery. Putin's fear of Russia's disintegration reinforces his determination that Russia must not only exercise influence but also must exercise control, to the extent Russia's weakened position permits, in all of the states that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union. This thinking links the conflict in Chechnya, the "frozen conflicts" in Moldova and the Caucasus and support for the status quo in Central Asia. On September 7, 2004 Putin spoke of this after the tragedy in Beslan, North

Ossetia, when terrorists killed nearly 400 people, many of them school children:

> Some would like to tear from us a "juicy piece of pie". Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world's major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to them.

This choice of words was only one of several interesting comments Putin made that day. In one respect, he sounded much like George W. Bush after 9/11:

> . . . to allow ourselves to be blackmailed and succumb to panic would be to immediately condemn millions of people to an endless series of bloody conflicts like those in Nagorny Karabakh, Trans-Dniester and other similar tragedies

Also in his speech at Beslan, he remarked that "we are living through a time when internal conflicts and interethnic divisions that were once firmly suppressed by the ruling ideology have now flared up." Putin added that Russia had not reacted adequately to new dangers: "We showed ourselves to be weak. And the weak get beaten." Moscow must show itself to be tough, he seems to think, even at the expense of its own best interests.

Putin's linking of Chechnya with other disputes in the Caucasus and Moldova was indicative of a mind-set that sees Russian withdrawal from its dominating positions in the new nations of post-Soviet space as tantamount to encouraging the disintegration of the Russian Federation itself. It helps to explain why the conflicts in Moldova, the Caucasus, and Chechnya have been so hard to resolve. Putin sees compromise as a slippery slope leading to the disintegration of Russia, or at least to the first step toward that, through a serious weakening of Russia's international position. His perception that Russian strength and unity can be served through supporting separatist entities around Russia's periphery and propping up leaders who resist change is one of his most serious misjudgments.

Russian authorities reported on March 8, 2005 that Aslan Maskhadov had been killed in a Russian "special operation." Maskhadov had been branded a terrorist by Moscow, and Putin refused to negotiate with him. Instead, Putin's solution has been to install a Chechen government that supports the unity of Chechnya and the Russian Federation, legitimizing that government through popular elections. The Russian-

installed president of Chechnya announced that these elections would be held in October 2005. It is a risky policy, for it assumes that those elements of the Chechen population who have favored independence from Russia can be suppressed militarily or reconciled with a Russian-backed government. There is to be no compromise with the separatists, who are condemned as terrorists, even though most are not.

President Bush has been relatively silent on Chechnya, presumably because he understands how sensitive this is for Putin and because he knows that Shamil Basayev, at least, is a bona fide terrorist. The official stance of the U.S. and other Western governments has been repeated for many years: there must be a political settlement that will end the fighting, promote reconciliation, and recognize the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. But without involving the substantial number of Chechens who supported Maskhadov in seeking a political settlement, it is difficult to see how reconciliation will be achieved.

Is there any end in sight? Probably Putin will work hard to show the Chechens that they can have a high degree of autonomy within the Russian Federation and that their economy will prosper through the connection. He could also buttress his case if he showed the same respect for the territorial integrity of Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan that he wants the world to show for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.

Central Asia

Five Central Asian nations--Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—round out the list of Russia's neighbors once part of the USSR. Economies in transition from one system to another can be found at different stages of development in each of these Central Asian states. Natural resources, including energy supplies, attract the interest of the world outside Central Asia, and have made for unequal social and economic development. Except for the former president of Kyrgyzstan, their leaders were major political figures in the Communist Parties of their republics during the Soviet era. They changed their titles but not their habits. Their political systems have not evolved very far beyond the authoritarianism of Soviet times and their leaders have tended to become more brutal and repressive the longer they stay in office. "Strong-man"

rule has been practiced in each of the five, with elections rigged to favor the incumbents and discourage opposition parties. Self-enrichment has been rampant among the ruling classes. Their reaction to the political changes in Georgia and Ukraine has been to tighten their control rather than to liberalize. To say that by 2005 they had worn out their welcome among the peoples of this region would be an understatement. That became increasingly clear in 2005 as uprisings occurred in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

In Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov, in office since 1990, made the transition from First Secretary of the Uzbekistan Communist Party, securing nearly 90% of the vote. Public demonstrations in the December 2004 parliamentary elections were quelled by the police, with 50 people reportedly being killed. Hundreds may have been killed in the violence that erupted in May 2005. This case highlights the contradictions between Bush's Second Inaugural emphasis on support for freedom and democracy and the accommodations that are made in the name of the war on terror. Karimov has accepted the presence of an American air force base on his country's territory since October 2001, and until the May massacre the United States had very little to say about his repressive domestic policies. These policies included routine torture of his own citizens. Reportedly, suspected terrorists from other nations were delivered to Uzbekistan for interrogation. Washington has now called for an independent investigation of the May uprising.

President Saparmyrat Nyazov of Turkmenistan also was First Secretary of the Communist Party, becoming president in 1990. He runs a personality cult government and retains absolute power. As elsewhere in Central Asia, Putin's government supports Nyazov's grip on power. The term of office of the president was extended from five to ten years by popular referendum in 1994 with only 212 votes reportedly cast against the proposition. Turkmenistan is clearly the most authoritarian society in Central Asia.

Tajikistan survived a bloody civil war which began in 1992 and was brought to an end several years later with the help of Russian troops. The president, Emamali Rakhmonov, entered into office in 1994 and was re-elected in 1999 with 97% of the vote. He, too, runs a one-party government which ignores democratic norms. Corruption and drug smuggling are major problems.

Nursultan Nazarbayev was elected president of Kazakhstan in 1991. He has maintained his power through the techniques of rigged elections and control of potentially troublesome independent power centers. Nazarbayev tolerated some dissent and opposition early in his presidency. Since the mid-1990s he has become intolerant of critics, opposition leaders and independent media. In reaction to the developments in Ukraine he has further tightened controls over society. Secretary of State Rice was unable to certify that Kazakhstan has been meeting international human rights norms during the past several months, citing closures of newspapers and a crackdown on dissent. Because of Kazakhstan's perceived strategic interest to the United States, the Secretary of State waived the requirement for certification so that U.S. assistance to Kazakhstan could continue.

In Kyrgyzstan, President Askar Akayev, once seen as an enlightened moderate, ran the country with more attention to democratic norms than other Central Asian leaders at the outset of his presidency. He became increasingly corrupt and anti-reformist with the passage of time. Making the transition from the Soviet system to president of the newly independent state of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, Akayev remained in office until uprisings broke out in March 2005. The parliamentary elections in February and March 2005 led to wide-spread complaints of fraud. This escalated into demonstrations in the south of the country and finally to violent protests in Akayev's own base in the north. Akayev fled the country, claiming that he was still president. He resigned in early April. The parliament elected in March 2005 in a process that the OSCE described as flawed was seated at the end of March by agreement with opposition leaders. Many of its members are business allies of Akayev.

The change in Kyrgyzstan was not inspired by generational politics as it was in Georgia and in Ukraine. Civil society, developed with Western help, had developed in Kyrgyzstan and was able to mobilize popular pressure on Akayevev. But internal regional rivalries and opposition among the elite to Akayev's manipulation of elections and his family's acquisition of great wealth were the basic causes of unrest. Kyrgyzstan's policies are not likely to change very much. There should be no geopolitical pluses or minuses there. Both the United States and Russia have bases in the

country.

Russia in the Euroatlantic Community

A "Europe whole and free" seemed almost attainable when the first President Bush spoke those words in Mainz, Germany on May 31, 1989. As Bush put it then, "the world has waited long enough. The time is right." The time is still right but until recently, that vision has been stifled. Since 1999, Putin's policies have sought to turn back the clock or at least slow down the process of change.

"So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." This is what President George W. Bush said in his Second Inaugural Address on January 20, 2005. In Belarus, in Moldova, in the Caucasus, and in Central Asia his policy is being tested, not only by those who govern states in those regions—or parts of them—but also by the Putin government. His policy also is being tested by conflicting policy goals established by his own administration. President Bush wants Russian support in the fight against terrorism and the effort to block the spread of nuclear weapons, for bases in Central Asia to back up American military operations in Afghanistan, for obtaining energy supplies from the Caspian and elsewhere.

If he is to be consistently true to the doctrine of the Second Inaugural, President Bush will be forced at times into sharp confrontations with the Putin government. President Putin's policies are clearly at odds with the Bush doctrine. But Bush's own policies in Central Asia also have been at odds with the Bush doctrine. His easier task will be to help Putin with Russia's long recessional from its imperial vocation. This means that:

- The administration's strategy toward Russia should be based on a vision of Russia's inclusion in the Euroatlantic community;
- Sharp dividing lines between Russia and its neighbors should be discouraged;
- Geopolitical competition, as in militarizing the U.S. relationship with Russia's neighbors, should be avoided;
- The Euroatlantic community should be regarded as a "single security space",

facing similar threats and working together to overcome them.

The Putin government's domestic policies threaten to derail Russia's integration with Europe, while Moscow's policies in "post-Soviet space" have been stunting the democratic development of Russia's neighbors, and delaying their integration into the Euroatlantic community of democracies. Increasingly Bush has taken public stances that are at odds with these policies, yet it is not clear that he wants to turn "post-Soviet space" into "pre-Euroatlantic community space," or help Putin think that way.

What specific policies could the Bush administration adopt that would help Russia with its long recessional from empire while easing the transition of nations on Russia's periphery to more democratic forms of governance? First, a more high-level and proactive American involvement will be necessary. This means real U.S. investment in these issues in terms of political capital and political energy. Second, expediency, as in the tension between U.S. bases and human rights in Central Asia, must give way to principle. Military bases bought at the price of condoning the suppression of freedom and democracy will make a mockery of the president's Second Inaugural promise to the world. Third, Bush must seek Russian cooperation in this, as in other matters, while recognizing that it will not always be possible. This should not be a geopolitical zero-sum game, as Secretary Rice has said, but if Moscow perceives political change in its neighborhood as a threat, it will play a spoiler role. Only when Moscow accepts change as inevitable and tries to accommodate to it can the barriers between Russia and the West be eliminated once and for all.

This is not the place to discuss the other pillar of the Euroatlantic community, the European Union and the other states of Western and Central Europe. It has to be underscored, however, that American diplomacy in Russia's neighborhood is only part of the total picture. The attraction of the EU for all of Russia's neighbors is hard to overstate. Reforms are the price for an association with the EU and so progress towards freedom and democracy is understood to be a price that must, to varying degrees, be paid. Pressure from European governments on issues like Chechnya has been more strongly expressed than by the Bush administration. European negotiators are working on

problems of the "frozen conflicts." The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, more influenced by Western Europeans than by Americans, has been in the vanguard of institutions promoting democratic reforms in Russia and in its neighborhood. A more proactive U.S. policy in Russia's neighborhood should involve close harmonization of U.S. and EU policies.

All too often the serious analysis of issues in the American-Russian relationship is hampered by an almost subconscious reaction that Russia does not matter very much any more. This is a strategic miscalculation. Bush talks as though he respects Russia, but he does not act that way. He needs to get Washington thinking about the Euroatlantic community of nations as a "Single Security Space" and should be encouraging Moscow to think that way too. Neither capital does, at this point. Realism, strength, and dialogue are the principles that underlay American policies towards the Soviet Union. They remain valid today in Washington's dealings with Russia.

Realism requires the United States to appreciate the fact that the Russian government does indeed think of loosening the reins in post-Soviet space in zero-sum terms, assuming that more independence for their neighbors must mean power will flow away from Russia and be collected by some other rival. But American strength is not abetted by over-militarizing Washington's relationships with these countries. And dialogue should make it possible to understand and accept Russian interests, like the Single Economic Space, to which Putin has attached great importance. Even though he no doubt sees this as a powerful instrument for integrating Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Russia there are likely to be limits on that integration. Each of Russia's partners wants to have close ties with the EU and they probably will not enter into an agreement that would tie their hands.

Realism, strength, and dialogue are needed, but also needed is a vision to point the way. That vision, in one word, should be *inclusion*. A Euroatlantic security community is the right goal for the United States and it should include Russia. There are likely to be three centers of gravity in such a community, the United States, the European Union, and Russia and no one of them is likely to dominate the other two. There will be differences between them but the essence of a community is that war has been excluded

as a means of reconciling these problems. One of the main reasons that a stable peace would exist in such a community is because democratic values and institutions would have permeated every member state.

Realism requires an understanding that internal conditions in Russia, and Moscow's policies towards its former dominions, are likely to stand in the way of Russia's full inclusion in a Euroatlantic community for a long time to come. Why pursue a vision that the present Russian government almost certainly does not share? Because it provides a magnetic North for a policy compass that easily could become disoriented in the face of conflicting interests. Because it fits with Bush's Second Inaugural declaration. And because any other American strategic goal than Russia's ultimate inclusion in a Euroatlantic security community would sow even more distrust, slow down political change in the region, create new walls, and result in a weakened common front against transnational threats.

The optimism of the first years following the end of the Cold War has given way to skepticism, even cynicism, about Russia's place in Europe. To renew the interrupted march toward a Euroatlantic community of democracies will require a major act of statecraft, and there are hopeful signs now that it could succeed. Failure to rise to the occasion will mean that this hinge point in history, beginning with the Cold War's end, will become just another tragic chapter in humanity's history..

The Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall are history, not to be repeated, but Putin's policies, if successful, would divide Russia from the Euroatlantic community by different means. Bush's selective application of his policies supporting freedom and democracy would encourage that. This matters. The fifty-year confrontation of the Cold War shows what can happen when Russia is divided from the West. Although Russia is not powerful economically, it is powerful in many other ways and its potential is vast. Even in the short term, Russia has a major role to play, for better or worse, in the political and economic development of its neighbors and in the marshalling of the full strength of the Euroatlantic community in fighting transnational threats.

The issue hangs in the balance, but when the people took matters into their own hands in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan the idea of a Europe whole and

free suddenly seemed attainable again. Russia's inclusion in a Euroatlantic community of democracies may not be so far off either.

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